

*Who Do You Say I Am?: a prophet*

Mark 11:15-18

March 14, 2010 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent

So we just heard about Jesus cleansing the temple, which really perturbed the religious authorities, but it may have been another event that got him executed.

Let's hear that story.

**Matthew 22:15-22**

Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said.

So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying,

"Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you regard people equally.

Tell us, then, what you think.

Is it a violation of Jewish law to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?"

But Jesus, aware of their malice, said,

"Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites?

Show me the coin used for the tax."

And they brought him a denarius.

Then he said to them,

"Whose head is this, and whose title?"

They answered,

"The emperor's."

Then he said to them,

"Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's."

When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

Jesus may have shamboozled the Pharisees, but he didn't pull the hood over the eyes and ears of the surrounding Roman guards who just heard him say that ultimate loyalty should go to the God rather than to Rome and Caesar, the earthly representative of the Roman gods.

There was only one word to describe this kind of activity – sedition.

Being a rabble rouser in the Temple is not going to set well with the Romans, but it was a religious protest.

However, encouraging people to turn their loyalty from the Roman Empire and giving it to God's Empire was nothing but seditious.

And it was just one more nail in the cross to go along with all of that preaching encouraging people to rebel against the Roman Empire and become part of God's Empire, the Kingdom of God.

He preached about this new Empire where the rich and powerful were thrown down and he encouraged the uprising of the poor. Blessed are the poor and the first shall become last.

He cast out demons that some say was just a theatrical way of encouraging people to cast out the demon Romans.

And he was beginning to gather quite a crowd -- sometimes thousands at a time.

He was becoming very, very dangerous.

Jesus went among the villages preaching that it was time;

the time is now for the Empire of God. Repent, leave behind the old ways and move ahead into God's Empire. [Mark 1:15]

“Repent, Repent!” became the battle cry.

It is time to leave behind the oppressive, hateful, merciless, sickening, impoverishing, idolatrous ways of the Roman Empire and its Temple collaborators and it is time to move ahead, move beyond into the Empire of God.

It is time to repent.

Repentance was an act of sedition, of disloyalty to the empire of Rome. Repentance was dangerous.

It wasn't just about changing personal habits, it was about changing the world.

The good prophets are always dangerous.

## So what exactly is a prophet?

A huge misconception is that a prophet is someone who predicts the future.

Put most simply a prophet is a messenger of God.

The message most often carried by the prophets was a call to the people to return their loyalty to God.

The prophets came in times when people started worshipping other god's and other things.

When God's people turned to worshipping Baal, or wealth or nation, the prophets were sent to call them back to loyalty to God.

Jesus was one of these prophets.

With Elijah, Isaiah, Micah, Amos, and Jeremiah Jesus delivered God's call to return to worshipping God alone.

But such a call is always a threat to those who are also plying for loyalty, be it a job, or nation, or ideology, or loyalty to one's own self-interest.

Jesus even called on people to turn their loyalty away from a religion that was exclusive and collaborated with the powerful to disenfranchise those who most needed God's love.

It was clear to Jesus that even religion can become an idol that is worshipped.

Religion can become an obstacle to loving God. And that was the case in Jesus day, when Temple worship was just another way of propping up an elite select group while excluding the great masses of the poor. The Temple establishment had become collaborators with the Roman Empire that treated the teeming masses of poor peasants as chattel and mere tools in Rome's grab for more wealth and power.

**Jesus call for repentance was a call to replace the powers that be with a love of God and ultimate loyalty to God.**

**Such a message is why prophets tend to be dangerous to themselves and to others.**

**There are a couple of other characteristics that we will find among the prophets.**

**To start with --they take sides.**

**So here's a couple of examples – see if you can pick out the prophets.**

Kathleen Parker, editorialist for the Denver Post wrote that

“In a time of constant calamity and crisis fatigue [in the U.S.], proposed legislation in Uganda to execute gays passes through the American consciousness with the impact of a weather report.”

She has this idea in her head that Americans Christians should be speaking out on this.

But she was very disappointed in the response of Rev. Rick Warren, the pastor Saddleback Church and famous for his authorship of his Purpose-Driven books.

In a statement to Newsweek Warren said, “it is not my personal calling as a pastor in America to comment or interfere in the political process of other nations.”

In a "Meet the Press" interview last November, Warren said he never takes sides.

Warren’s response was pretty much the response of the majority of American Christians in the 1930’s to the Nazi treatment of the Jews.

Ms. Parker asks -- If we decide that genocide is too political for interference, then what good is moral leadership?

Read more:

[http://www.denverpost.com/opinion/ci\\_14429438?source=rss#ixzz0hDclhWjo](http://www.denverpost.com/opinion/ci_14429438?source=rss#ixzz0hDclhWjo)

Again in the editorial section of the Post a couple weeks ago was an article about a group of leading Colorado clergy, and religious educators, Jewish and Christian, who were taking sides and calling on Colorado Christians to end their silence pertaining to the Palestinian/Israeli conflict.

They said that, “Such ‘Christian silence’ is rooted to a great extent in ignorance of what is actually happening in the Holy Land, and it is also rooted in a legitimate fear of offending Jewish neighbors and fellow citizens.”

Read more:

[http://www.denverpost.com/commented/ci\\_14507615?source=commented-#ixzz0hDhmCtSe](http://www.denverpost.com/commented/ci_14507615?source=commented-#ixzz0hDhmCtSe)

Taking sides usually offends someone.

But that’s what prophets do.

It’s what Jesus did – it’s what made him so dangerous.

**Which is the other important characteristic about prophets -- they are rarely popular. In particular, they tend to be very unpopular with those in power, with those supporting the status quo and unpopular with those who are afraid to rock the boat.**

But, can you imagine if Moses would have told God,

“Sorry Yahweh but I don’t take sides.”

Or, how about Elijah saying,

“No thanks, I really don’t want to get people mad at me.”

Or, Jesus,

“No thanks God, that Kingdom of God talk could really hang me up (if you know what I mean) and really cramp my social calendar.”

Here’s another interesting characteristic of most of classical prophets – they were not the religious type – they weren’t professional clergy.

In fact, they often found themselves at odds with the professionals.

Here’s a few examples:

Moses – was a shepherd

Amos- was a shepherd

Jeremiah – was but a young boy

Jesus – a carpenters son

Maybe it's because the professional clergy fear losing their job or pledge support if they rock the boat.

But there are exceptions;  
like Martin Luther King and Bishop Oscar Romero -- but then look at what happened to them.

My point is that **any of you** may be called to be a prophet.

And if past performance is any indicator of future possibility, it is more likely that a lay person would have more of a prophetic impact than a religious professional.

Whether lay or clergy, the prophet is dangerous -- it's what a prophet does.

A prophet makes us see new realities,  
makes us uncomfortable in our current life.

A prophet calls us to a closer relationship with  
God

which always means leaving behind the safe and comfortable and entering a wilderness of uncertainty and ambiguity where new realities are born and we see new visions of the Realm of God.

That is what Jesus did.

## So who was Jesus?

So far, we have seen that Jesus was a Jewish cynic, who healed the sick as a sign of God's love, prophetically called people to repent from their idolatry and give their ultimate allegiance to God alone and preached about the apocalyptic arrival of God's Empire.

But there is still more to finding out who Jesus **was** before we can today answer the question **we** are asked; and that question is not, "who do you say I was," but rather – "Who do you say I am?"  
AMEN.